Christmas Number

New York Tribune Magazine

PART V EIGHT PAGES SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1916 PART V EIGHT PAGES

RED CHRISTMAS; A DREAM AND AN AWAKENING

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PROBABLY the plum pudding did it. It was Christmas Eve, and the war correspondent had been dining with the officers of a Canadian regiment. He had had three different invitations, but he chose the Canadians because, being an American, he felt that they would make his Christmas dinner somewhere in France seem a little more like home.

He had been on the job for months, and was fresh from a session with the first line troops. He had seen some sanguinary fighting, which resulted in the capture of a patch of wreckage that had once been a village, and he had come back from the front through an interminable procession of mangled men in motor ambulances. He was war sick and gun sick, and his nerves were on edge. During the dinner he had risen to a sort of hectic gayety. There had been the plum pudding, and, miraculously enough, a little champagne. Champagne never agreed with him, but he had accepted two glasses. And now, as he went back to his lodging through the dark and silent street, the reaction had set in and he felt utterly weary and spiritless.

The Plum Pudding Begins To Set the Stage

He was lodged in a perfectly good house, save that a portion of the rear wall had been blown out by a shell, and of course it was black as pitch inside and cold as a tomb. He stumbled up the stairs to his room and groped toward the armchair of which his landlord was so proud. There he flung himself down, without any energy left for undressing and getting to bed. The plum pudding was resting uneasily, and there was a throbbing in his head which kept time to the distant pounding of the guns. He closed his eyes, and he wished he could close his ears, too, to shut out the terrible sound. . . . A few minutes later he was peering over the topmost gallery of a crowded colosseum.

It looked like Carnegie Hall, but he suspected it was the Peace Palace at The Hague. At first he thought it might be an Ethical Culture meeting, for on the platform Felix Adler was preparing to read from a big book. But the presiding officer was a patriarchal old man with a long white beard, dressed in the flowing robes of the Orient. Rabindranath Tagore, surely. And the audience was—well, a curiously polyglot audience.

"What is this meeting?" asked the correspondent of the man on his right, who proved to be Henry Ford.

"It's the Peace Conference," replied Ford.

The correspondent looked about amazedly. "Why, there's not a single lawyer or diplomat!" he cried. "I don't see any kings."

"No," said Ford, gently. "They're so—so messy. These men are mostly just writers—good writers. Psychologists of humanity, Zangwill calls them."

Sure enough, they were writers, evidently from all parts of the world. There were Chinese and Hindus and men of many races and colors scattered through that great delegation, among familiar Occidental faces. Some clergymen were there, too, several Catholic priests of a rural aspect, Buddhist monks from the mountains of Tibet, venerable rabbis from the East, and a Presbyterian minister who had a little church in Harlem, near Morningside Park. But for the most part they were writers. On the platform were Gorky and Galsworthy and Jane Addams; Maeterlinck, sitting next to Maximilian Harden; Anatole France and Romain Rolland, and at Tagore's right hand a man the correspondent had never seen before.

"That's George Russell," said his left-hand neighbor, "editor of a little agricultural paper in Ireland, and one of the wisest men in the world."

"Blessed Are the Meek"—It Had a Familiar Sound

Dr. Adler, with a queer, emotional catch in his cold voice, was beginning to read now from the big book, and the correspondent caught a phrase here and there. "Blessed are the meek"——

"Isn't that the Sermon on the Mount?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Of course," replied Ford. "Didn't I tell you this was the Peace Conference?"

Presently Tagore rose.

"Our task is not simply to end this war," he said, "but to banish fear and hatred from the human race forever, to exorcise the evil spirits of greed and oppression that have been the curse of earth. We cannot make a new map of the world and stop there; we must make a new map of the human soul. Perhaps no man and no body of men is wise enough to attempt these things. We must put our trust in something greater even than wisdom—the power of brotherhood and human love."

From the midst of the auditorium the reddish-gray beard of Bernard Shaw bobbed up suddenly.

"Isn't It Time to Try the Doctrine of Love?"

"We've tried all sorts of panaceas," he cried, "and invariably they've led us only to chaos and destruction. For most people life is a bitter struggle in peace as well as in war. Isn't it time to try Christianity—the doctrine of love?"

Israel Zangwill jumped up beside him. "We're all with you there, if love is your argument," he said.

Across the aisle a lean and aged Chinese delegate got upon his feet, the tears streaming down his sallow cheeks.

"We have waited so long for a word from the West," he said, "but you would speak to us only through the mouths of guns. Now"——

"Will you come with me, Henry?" said a voice behind the correspondent. He turned to see Santa Claus, in his long, red robe, edged with white cotton batting, leaning over Ford's shoulder.

"They'll be talking here for a time, and I want to show you some action," he said.

The correspondent remembered he was a reporter and brushed his sleeve across his eyes. "May I come?" he asked.

"Always room for one more," replied Santa.

"Did you start this?" the reporter asked Ford, as they left the gallery.

"Oh, no," replied Ford, with a chuckle. "Everybody started it. I merely hired the hall."

Santa led them to the roof, where a big battle 'plane was waiting. Its two machine guns had been removed, and in their places stood tiny Christmas trees, which blossomed in colored electric lights as soon as the motor started.

"I couldn't use the sleigh to-night," explained Santa, as he took his seat at the wheel. "The reindeer are afraid of the guns."

With a great roar they swept out into the night. Westward they flew, and then south. Above them the stars glittered, and far below the ground was white with snow. Presently this white surface became cut with black gashes, and they knew they were above the trenches. Guns were speaking in a desultory way, and from time to time a flare from one of the trenches lighted up a great patch of earth.

"At dawn to-day," said Santa, "at Zangwill's suggestion, hundreds of Allied air squadrons flew over the German lines from Alsace to the sea bombarding them with copies of Dickens's 'Christmas Carol.' The Germans were prepared, and later, in retaliation, their air squadrons pelted the Allies' trenches with copies of Grimm's 'Fairy Tales.'"

Out of the medley of sound a twist of wind brought to their ears faintly the chime of a village church bell.

"Midnight," said Santa. "Watch."

The guns fell silent suddenly. All along the German trenches the soldiers were leaping out by thousands and charging toward the Allies' lines.

"Why, it's suicidal!" exclaimed the correspondent. "Von Hindenburg must be mad."

"Every one is mad to-night," roared the jolly saint. "They have left their guns behind; and here come the French and British, unarmed, to meet them."

The men of the hostile armies came together in the centre of that grim territory known as No Man's Land. They met with embracings and huzzas, as if they had suddenly been set free from a terrible burden. Together they shouted and danced there under the stars, in rough quadrilles, in wild circles, with hands linked together, or, hands on shoulders, in long serpentine lines they pranced about like victorious football fans.

The Kaiser Flies With Sir Edward Grey

Presently a Taube, flying swiftly toward the north, passed just under Santa's 'plane.

"Hullo! That's the Kaiser and Sir Edward Grey," cried Santa. "Shall we follow?"

It took full speed to track the Taube, which was streaking along at a fiendish pace. Once or twice they lost sight of it, but Santa seemed to know where it was bound, and when he finally landed in a ruined square in Louvain the Taube was to be seen close by. Sir Edward was seated beside it, talking with General von Bissing and Rudyard Kipling, but the Kaiser was over in the shadow of a wall smashing with an axe something that proved to be a "verboten" sign.

"I must have missed that one," said von Bissing, apologetically, when the Kaiser returned.

"But you've got the Christmas dinners?" asked the Kaiser.

"A Fat Goose and Fixin's for Every Family in Belgium," Said von Bissing

Goodies for the Belgians; Count Zeppelin Helps

"A fat goose and fixin's for every family in Belgium," said von Bissing. "It was an awful job to get them, but Count Zeppelin helped a lot, and now Hoover is distributing them."

"Willie," said Santa Claus, "I had a present for you, but I'm afraid I've left it in my sleigh. It's an abdication blank."

The Kaiser laughed, and it was a good laugh to hear.

"I attended to that hours ago," he cried. "Liebknecht's forming a committee to take things over temporarily. And, of course, I've got to go into the building business. First, I'm going to restore all the homes in this city. I can't restore all the people that lived in them, but I'll make the others comfortable. And that's just the beginning. I'm a rich man, and I can do a great deal before I die. Besides, I've always fancied myself as an architect."

He turned with a quick change to gravity toward Sir Edward Grey.

"What fools we've been, Grey!" he exclaimed. "All these years, all these generations! What unimaginative, vicious fools!"

"There have been too many second rate lawyers at the head of things, that's the truth," said Sir Edward.

"And too many second-rate kings."

"I'm beginning to think every lawyer is an anachronism now."

"And I'm sure about the kings."

"Speaking of kings," said Santa, "where is your son?"

"I left him in Verdun," said the Kaiser simply. "He was kneeling in the middle of a battered street, weeping and praying. I thought he wouldn't want to see me for a while, so I came away."

"Weren't you afraid that he"—— began some one.

"Oh, no. Papa Joffre was there comforting him. It was just after I had offered Joffre my sword. He took mine and his and tossed them into the river, saying: 'They'll never be red again with anything but rust—which is an excellent thing for swords.'"

"Bravo!" exclaimed von Bissing.

"The Czar is out, too," said the Kaiser. "The Russian Republic was declared to-night. The grand dukes have decided to retire to a monastery in Siberia, but the Czar will stick around and work. He plans to build at his own expense 20,000 schools for the people of Russia."

"England," remarked Sir Edward Grey, "has come out for a two-power educational system. For every schoolhouse the Czar puts up we shall build two in Egypt and India."

A British Tank Aglow With Lighted Candles

At this moment a British tank, its ports bristling, not with machine guns, but with lighted candles, came gallumping into the square. Out of it leaped General Bernhardi with an armful of his books in praise of war, which he dumped upon the ground. General von Falkenhayn followed with the collected works of Professor Treitschke, and presently a huge pile of volumes was heaped up. Bernhardi asked Santa for a match. Kipling added to the heap some of his own imperialistic poems, and the match was applied.

"There goes the White Man's Burden," said Kipling. "Before to-night I never knew the meaning of the term. It's this sentimental twaddle we've all been talking about, military glory and national honor and civilizing weaker peoples with machine guns. It's perpetuating this rot with silly old battleships and 42-centimetre guns. As if a nation could be great in any way except through liberty, equality and kindliness. We've all been as far off the real track as Downing Street is from Galilee."

"Or as Potsdam is from Bethlehem," added the Kaiser.

"Come on, fellers," cried Bernhardi, as the flames leaped up. "Let's dance around the fire."

Some Belgian children had crept out of the darkness to see the blaze. Von Bissing took the hands of two of these, Sir Edward linked up with von Falkenhayn and Bernhardi, and in an instant a merry shouting circle was whirling about. But the Kaiser, who had only one good hand, poor thing, stayed out of the game. Presently he went over to an old Belgian woman.

"Mother," he said, with a gesture toward the children, "is there a store hereabouts where I can buy some lollipops?"

About this time Santa said they must go, and in a few minutes the correspondent was back in his seat in the great hall. The formal part of the session was over, and the delegates were standing in groups, laughing and talking. Above the hum of sound one great, roaring voice beneath the gallery leaped out like thunder. Leaning over the rail, the correspondent saw a man like a hippopotamus talking with one who seemed half pagan poet and half Yankee evangelist. It was really G. K. Chesterton bawling at Editor Max Eastman and poking him violently in the ribs.

Crossing Capital and Capitalizing the Cross

"After all," Chesterton was shouting, "revolution is merely a going back to old things. You have begun by crossing Capital, and you will probably end by capitalizing the Cross. You have begun by calling your paper 'The Masses,' and you will probably end by calling it 'The Mass'; for chiding sinners is really but a negative way of praising the saints, and Blasphemy is merely the naughty sister of Prayer, and the red torch of the radical exhibits the same chemical phenomena as the white candle of the priest."

Chesterton might have kept this up for hours if it had not been for a diversion caused by Bernard Shaw. A boy had handed him a telegram, and as soon as Shaw read it he stood on his hands in the middle of the floor, kicking his feet in the air and screaming with laughter, much to the amazement of a sober Japanese delegate, who had been conversing with him.

Some one carried the telegram, along with Shaw, to the platform. The chairman read:

"George V has resigned, and Parliament votes unanimously that Shaw be invited to take the throne."

"That's so wonderfully English," cried Shaw when the uproar of cheers and laughter had subsided. "They persist in the tradition that the King must be a foreigner. My first act will be to tear down and rebuild the Whitechapel slums."

"But where will the poor people live meanwhile?" asked Jane Addams.

"Oh, in Buckingham and Windsor," responded Shaw carelessly. "And those that wish an ocean trip we can send off on the dreadnoughts to the South Sea and Coney Island and such places. We must use the navy for something, you know."

"Here's another message," announced the chairman, "a wireless from Sayville. All the Standard Oil companies have declared special Christmas dividends of 50 per cent, payable to the consumer."

The Dreamer Loses His Balance and Falls

At this moment a curtain shrouding the back of the stage was raised, and there stood the biggest Christmas tree in the world, which Count Zeppelin himself had just brought over from Norway, all a-glitter with candles and shiny trinkets. On either side of it was a great mountain of presents, and in front stood Santa, laughing and shaking like a bowlful of jelly. Some one pushed a piano out from the wings, and then out pranced George Cohan in his old Yankee Doodle clothes. He began playing the piano with hands and feet and elbows and singing a song of which the refrain was "It's a Grand Old World," and all the delegates joined in the chorus lustily, while Maeterlinck and the venerable Gerhart Hauptmann danced a ragtime down the front of the stage.

The correspondent was laughing and crying so that he lost his balance and fell, head first, over the rail. Just below him, on the main floor, sat a plump and placid Chinese delegate; and the reporter was shooting down, like a plummet or a foul fly, upon the unsuspecting Oriental. He became aware that Ty Cobb was rushing up the aisle to catch him, but he suspected Ty would be too late. He was sorry for the Chinaman. If Ty were to fumble him!——

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Well, he was back, sitting in his armchair, and outside the red snow was falling like flakes of blood. At least it looked red, because somewhere toward the front a burning village stained the sky with a horrible crimson caricature of dawn. A motor ambulance rumbled past, in which some torn maniac was screaming. And sinister and terrible sounded the grinding thunder of the guns.

The correspondent rushed to the window and, flinging up the sash, stretched out his hands to the lurid gray sky. He cried out in a voice hoarse with bitterness and horror:

"Oh, God, put me to sleep again!"

The Plum Pudding Was Resting Uneasily